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First day of the Syria peace talks, in Montreux, in Switzerland

SYRIA PEACE TALKS

On 31st January Lakhdar Brahimi held a press conference in Geneva, one of Switzerland's largest cities. He spoke with newspaper and television reporters. Mr Brahimi declared that the first peace talks between the two opposing sides in Syria had ended. The talks had gone on for eight days.

Mr Brahimi said there had been no breakthrough agreements. However, he explained that both sides had agreed to be in the same room. This was the first time they had spoken to each other. Mr Brahimi has spent many months trying to get the opposing sides in Syria to agree to talks. He has been helped by Russia and the USA.

Mr Brahimi was appointed as the United Nations (UN) and Arab League peace envoy to Syria in 2012. The UN and the Arab League asked him to try to find a way of ending Syria's civil war.

Mr Brahimi is from Algeria. He used to work for the Arab League. This organisation has 22 member countries. All use Arabic as their official language.

For the last three years the Syrian army has been fighting against several opposition groups in the country. The army supports Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad. The opposition groups, which are often called 'rebels', are demanding that Mr al-Assad leave Syria. They want to elect new leaders.

The fighting began after people organised street protests in the south of the country. They were demonstrating against Mr al-Assad and his government. The president and his father before him have controlled Syria for over 40 years.

Syrian soldiers were ordered to stop the demonstrations. Guns were fired at unarmed protesters. Later some of the soldiers changed sides and joined the

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demonstrators. They formed a new group called the Free Syrian Army (FSA). Several other rebel groups were set up. They also began to fight the Syrian army.

There are two main religious groups in Syria, Sunni and Shia Muslims. The majority of Syria's population is Sunni. The president and his family are members of a small religious group called Alawites. This group is connected to the Shia branch of the Islamic faith. Most of those who oppose Mr al-Assad are Sunni Muslims. The majority of people who support the president are Shia.

The Syrian government has always had help and support from Iran. Iran is the main Shia-led country in the Middle East. Iran also helps Hezbollah, which is based in southern Lebanon. Hezbollah is a Shia political and military organisation. Its fighters get most of their weapons from Iran. Recently, Hezbollah fighters have been operating in Syria. There, they have been fighting alongside the Syrian army against the rebels.



Entrance to the UN's Palais des Nations, in Geneva, where the peace talks were held

Since the war in Syria began Russia has also been supporting Mr al-Assad and his government. Traditionally, Russia has been a friend and ally of Syria. Syria buys many things from Russia including weapons.

The USA, the UK, France, and several Arab countries, such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia, have been backing the rebels. The rebels get

most of their weapons from Saudi Arabia and Qatar. These countries are led by Sunni Muslims.

Several Islamic militant groups have now also joined the fight against the Syrian army. People from other Arab countries, such as Iraq, have set up these militant organisations. These groups' leaders want to create an Islamic state in Syria. If this happens everyone living in the country would have to follow very strict Islamic laws. Even though they are all fighting against the Syrian army the rebels and the militant groups do not work together. Sometimes they even attack each other.

Since the war in Syria began over 135,000 people have been killed. There have been many civilian deaths, including women and children. The UN believes that around 9.5 million people have been forced to leave their homes. At least two million Syrians have crossed the borders into Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon to get away from the fighting. Most of these people are now living in large refugee camps.

Many people think the war in Syria has become a stalemate. This means neither side is likely to win. They say a peace agreement is the only way to end the fighting. Yet getting all of those involved in the war to take part in peace talks has been very difficult. Syrian government officials insist that all the groups fighting against them are terrorists and criminals. They say these people only want to destroy their country.

The rebels are divided. Many of them argue that there should not be any peace talks until Mr al-Assad leaves the country. The Islamic militant groups say they are not interested in peace negotiations.

Neither side wanted to go to the peace talks in Switzerland. Russia

and the USA made sure that they did. Russian officials told the Syrian government that it had to take part. The American government threatened the people representing the rebels. It said if they did not go to Switzerland the USA would stop helping them.



The peace talks began at a hotel in Montreux, in Switzerland. Senior government officials from over 30 countries were invited for the first day. The talks then moved to the Palais des Nations in Geneva. There, Mr Brahimi tried to get the two opposing groups to speak with each other. The Palais des Nations is one of the largest diplomatic conference centres in the world. It is also the UN's headquarters in Switzerland.

Some people hoped that the two sides would agree to ceasefires in certain Syrian cities such as Homs. The fighting has trapped thousands of civilians in these cities for many months. The UN says ceasefires are needed, as these people have little food and medicine. Yet no agreements about ceasefires were made.

It's thought that about 1,900 people were killed in Syria while the peace talks were being held in Geneva. At the press conference Mr Brahimi described the talks as 'a very modest beginning, but a beginning on which we can build'. He hopes that the two sides will meet again in Geneva for more talks on 10th February. ■

TEXTBOOK CHANGES IN JAPAN

On 28th January the Japanese minister for education made an announcement. He said that some books used for teaching history and geography would be revised, or changed. Teachers in Japanese junior and high schools will now tell their students that several islands in the East China Sea and the East Sea (also called the Sea of Japan) belong to Japan.



The minister's announcement angered people in China, South Korea and Taiwan. This is because these countries also claim to own some of the islands.

The **disputed** islands are known by different names. Those in the East China Sea are quite close to China and near Taiwan. They are a long way from the main islands of Japan. However, the island group is not too far from Okinawa, one of Japan's most southerly islands. The Japanese call them the Senkaku Islands. In China they are known as the Diaoyu. People call them the Tiaoyutai Islands in Taiwan.

The islands are normally uninhabited. Some people even describe them as eight large rocks. The islands are important, as whichever country controls them also owns a large area of the surrounding seas. These waters contain many fish. There may

also be large supplies of oil and gas under the seabed close by.

Different names are also used for a group of islands in the East Sea. In many atlases made outside South Korea and Japan the islands are listed as the Liancourt Rocks. Liancourt was the name of a French ship that almost sailed into the rocks in 1849. Koreans call the islands Dokdo. In Japan they are known as Takeshima. The islands are about the same distance from both countries. Since 1954 several South Korean officials have been based on the islands.

China, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan have disagreed about these island groups before. Many people believe that the main reason for these disagreements is historical.

In 1894 and 1895 Japan and China fought a war against each other. China was easily defeated. Japan then took control of Taiwan (then known as Formosa) and the nearby small islands. In 1910 it seized control of what is now both North and South Korea. In the early 1930s Japan occupied the northern part of China. Its army then began to take over other large areas of the country.

During this period many Japanese troops and their commanders behaved very badly. Tens of thousands of people were needlessly killed. In 1941 Japan launched a surprise attack on the American naval base at Pearl Harbour, in Hawaii. This attack marked the start of the Second World War in the Pacific.

During the next four years Japanese forces occupied several other Asian countries such as Malaysia, Burma (now also known as Myanmar) and the Philippines. Often the Japanese treated some local people in these countries in a cruel and inhumane way. By 1944 Japan was losing the war. It eventually admitted

defeat and surrendered in 1945. This was after the USA had dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Many people in Asian countries believe that Japan's leaders have never properly apologised for what their country did in the past. Apologies have been made, but many think they have not been **sincere**.

Government officials in China and South Korea say that textbooks used in Japanese schools should not be changed. They insist that teaching students that these islands belong to Japan is **distorting** or falsifying history. ■

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

On 27th January a large ceremony took place at Auschwitz-Birkenau, in Poland. It was held to mark International Holocaust Remembrance (or Memorial) Day. On this day every year memorial events are arranged in many countries. People are asked to remember all those who died in the Holocaust.



Recent photograph of one of the entrances to the Auschwitz extermination camp

The Holocaust is the name given to the killing of millions of people by the Nazis during the Second World War (1939 – 1945). Those murdered included around six million Jews and two million Roma, or Gypsies.

Before the Second World War started, Nazi officials set up special camps in Germany. These became known as concentration camps. Many people who spoke out against the Nazis or their ideas were sent to them. At first most people in the camps were forced to work as slave labour.

After the war began more concentration camps were set up in other countries. Some were specially designed. This was so tens of thousands of people could be murdered inside them.

The Nazis sent millions of Jewish people from many European countries to these camps in overcrowded trains. They were often told that they were being moved to new homes. Yet when they arrived some were forced to work while most were murdered. In some camps many thousands died of starvation or disease.

In several camps hundreds of thousands were killed in gas chambers and their bodies burnt. Nowadays these types of camps are usually called **extermination** camps. Of all the extermination camps perhaps the most well-known today is Auschwitz-Birkenau (often called Auschwitz).

The extermination camps were set up by an organisation called the 'SS', or the Nazis' special police. When the war ended many of the people who ran the camps were put on trial for what they had done. Most were found guilty of war crimes and executed.

After the end of the war different countries remembered the Holocaust on different days. In 2005 the United Nations (UN) decided to **designate** 27th January as International Holocaust Remembrance Day. The date is significant. This is because Russian soldiers arrived and freed the people in Auschwitz on 27th

January 1945. Therefore, 27th January 2005 was the 60th anniversary of the **liberation** of Auschwitz.

This year's memorial ceremony at Auschwitz was attended by a group of 250 people. They included 60 politicians from the Knesset, or Israel's parliament. Politicians from many other countries as well as 24 Holocaust survivors and their families also took part.



Jewish people arriving at Auschwitz in 1944

On 26th January a German newspaper printed parts of personal letters and diaries. These belonged to Heinrich Himmler, who was the leader of the SS. These diaries and letters had not been seen before. Many of the letters were from Himmler to his wife. Neither the letters nor diaries mention what was happening in the camps. At the end of the war British soldiers captured Himmler. Soon afterwards he killed himself by swallowing poison. ■

'BATTLE FOR OUR BIRDS'

Government officials in New Zealand are worried about many of the country's birds. Later this year they expect a sudden increase in the numbers of rats, mice and stoats. These small mammals will eat birds' eggs and chicks. On 30th January the officials outlined a plan to protect the birds. They call it 'Battle for Our Birds'.

Before settlers arrived in New Zealand the only land-based mammals were bats. Unlike other parts of the world there were no mammals that preyed on birds. This explains why many birds in New Zealand make their nests on the ground. Because there were few predators some of the country's birds have evolved in ways that mean they cannot fly. One of these flightless birds is the kiwi.

Kiwis, which are about the size of chickens, are only found in New Zealand. There are several species of kiwi. Some are now in danger of becoming extinct. The birds are a national symbol of the country. Nowadays people from New Zealand are often called 'kiwis'.

Some small mammals, such as rodents (or rats and mice), arrived in New Zealand by accident. They were brought to the country on ships. Rabbits were deliberately introduced. When the rabbit population became too large, stoats were set free to control them. Now the rats, mice and stoats are endangering many of the country's ground-nesting birds.



Kiwi

This year the country's millions of beech trees will produce many more seeds than usual. This is known as a beech mast, or masting. In New Zealand there is a beech mast about once every 10 to 15 years. Scientists are not sure why they happen. A possible cause is changes in summer temperatures.

NewsCAST

WORM EXPERIMENT — Tapeworms are parasites. They live inside humans and other animals. A person can get a tapeworm by eating pork or beef, which is infected with their eggs. The worms grow in the intestines. Some tapeworms grow to a length of 20 metres (65 feet). People who have tapeworms get hungry, as the worm eats some of their food. A scientist in the UK has made a television programme about parasites. As an experiment he swallowed some tapeworm eggs. Three worms then began to grow inside him. He filmed them by swallowing a pill camera. The scientist said the worms made him very hungry. He wanted to eat a lot of chocolate and carbohydrates. The scientists joked that this must be the tapeworms' favourite food. Once the experiment was over he took some special drugs, which killed the worms.

Rats and mice eat beech seeds. Therefore when there are many more seeds the rodent population suddenly increases. This is known as a population explosion. Stoats prey on rats and mice. So, if there are more rodents, the number of stoats also increases. Like rats and mice, stoats will eat young chicks and birds' eggs.

Scientists predict that there will be 30 million extra rats in some parts of New Zealand. In the spring, when the beech seeds start to germinate, or grow, the rats and mice will eat even more chicks and eggs. In a normal year rodents and stoats are believed to kill about 25 million birds. A plague of rats that followed a beech mast in 2000 is thought to have killed all the mōhua in one part of New Zealand.

Mōhua (also called the yellowhead) is a small type of bird.

Officials fear that because of the beech mast some of the country's endangered birds might disappear. They include ducks, wrens, rare parrots and kiwis. Other wildlife such as bats, giant snails and geckos may also be in danger.

Helicopters will be used to drop poison on 35 large areas of forest. Hopefully many of the rats, mice and stoats will then eat the poison. Called 1080, the poison has been used before on some smaller islands to control rat populations. The helicopters that will drop the poison have special navigation devices. This means that their crews will be able to make sure that all parts of the 35 forested areas are covered. ■

MICROSOFT'S NEW BOSS

Last August, Steve Ballmer, the boss of the Microsoft Company, said that he planned to retire, or step down. Since then people have been wondering who would be the company's new boss, or chief executive officer (CEO). On 4th February the company made an announcement. It said Satya Nadella had been appointed as Microsoft's new CEO. He took over from Mr Ballmer on the same day.

Microsoft is one of the world's most successful businesses. The company's headquarters are in the USA. Most of the computers in the world have Microsoft's software installed on them. Over one billion people use the company's products. Microsoft makes most of its money from its Windows operating system and from its Office software. This includes Word, Powerpoint, Excel, Outlook and other applications. Last year the company's total sales were

US\$78 billion (£47 billion). Of this almost US\$22 billion (£13.5 billion) was profit.

Two school friends, Bill Gates and Paul Allen, started Microsoft in 1975. In 1983 Mr Allen became seriously ill. Even though he recovered, Mr Allen never returned to work for the company. By 1986 Microsoft had become the world's biggest software company. Then, at the age of 31, Mr Gates was the youngest self-made billionaire in the world.

In 2008 Steve Ballmer took over as Microsoft's CEO. Mr Gates became Microsoft's chairman. At that time Mr Gates said he wanted to spend more time working with the charitable foundation he had set up with his wife. This organisation, which is called the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, helps poor people in many less wealthy countries. Today Mr Gates is one of the richest people in the world.



Microsoft's new CEO, Satya Nadella

On 4th February, as well as announcing that Mr Nadella would be its new boss, Microsoft said Mr Gates would step down as chairman. John Thompson will take his place.

One of Microsoft's biggest competitors is the Apple Company. Apple is different from Microsoft as it makes its own hardware, such as computers and smartphones, as well as its own software.

Traditionally, Microsoft only made software. Its software is

designed to work on laptops, computers and mobile phones made by other companies.

While Mr Ballmer has been in charge Microsoft has **diversified**. This means it has become involved in other businesses. In 2011 Microsoft bought, or acquired, the Skype Company. It paid US\$8.5 billion (£5.2 billion) for the internet telephone and video call service. Last year, Microsoft agreed to pay €5.4 billion (£4.5 billion) for Nokia's mobile phone business.

Mr Nadella has worked for Microsoft for 22 years. For the last seven months he was in charge of Microsoft's 'cloud' services and software. This is a new business for the company. It is only a small part of Microsoft, but has been growing quickly.

Mr Nadella, who is 46 years old, was born and educated in India. He joined Microsoft in 1992 after moving to the USA. Even though Mr Gates is no longer chairman of the company, Microsoft says he will continue to give technical advice to Mr Nadella. ■

LUNAR NEW YEAR

The Lunar New Year began on 31st January. Chinese people all around the world organised large celebrations to welcome the arrival of the Year of the Horse. In some of the larger Chinese cities, such as Hong Kong, there were huge firework displays.

The Lunar New Year is also known as Chinese New Year. The Chinese calendar is based on the cycles of the Moon. It's therefore what's known as a lunar calendar. This means it does not match up exactly with the international, or Gregorian calendar, which most people now use. In the Chinese calendar,

the New Year that has just started is not 2014 but 4712.

In the international calendar the date on which Chinese New Year begins changes each year. For example, in 2013 the first day of the Year of the Snake was 10th February. Next year, which will be the Year of the Goat, will start on 19th February.

The Chinese calendar (or Chinese or animal zodiac) works on a 12-year cycle. An animal represents each year. The cycle begins with the Year of the Rat. Each year's animal is associated with one of the five 'elements': wood, metal, fire, water, and earth. This year the 'wood' horse takes over from the 'water' snake.

No one knows why these 12 animals are used. However, one legend says that Buddha organised a race. The first animal to touch his foot would win. At first the tiger was in front. But it soon got tired. The ox then overtook the tiger. The rat was hiding in the ox's tail. As the ox got near to Buddha the rat ran along its back. It then jumped off the ox's nose to win the race.



Chinese zodiac

Afterwards Buddha decided that the years would follow the order in which the animals finished the race. First is the Rat. The Ox is second. They are followed by: Tiger, Hare (or

Rabbit), Dragon, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and Pig.

In China the New Year is also known as the Spring Festival. This is because it traditionally marks the end of winter. The full Spring Festival lasts for 15 days, or until the first full Moon. There are different celebrations on each day. In China red is the colour of celebration and **prosperity**, or good fortune and wealth. Children receive gifts of small sealed red envelopes containing money from their relatives.



Dragon dance

In China many factory workers live in cities that are far away from their families in the countryside. For most of them the Spring Festival is the only time of year that they are able to go home to visit their relatives. This means that at the beginning and end of the festival, tens of millions of people travel on trains and buses. It is the biggest movement of people all at one time anywhere in the world. For example, about 20 million people live and work in Beijing, China's capital. Yet over New Year about one-third of them leave the city. Most factory workers have at least one week's holiday during the Spring Festival.

The dragon is always an important symbol of traditional Chinese celebrations. Of the 12 animals, the dragon is the only **mythical** one. In European countries dragons in legends and folklore are frightening and dangerous. Yet in Chinese stories they are supposed to bring good

luck and symbolise power. During most New Year celebrations there is a dragon dance. The longer the dragon in the dance the more luck it brings to local people. ■

CELAC MEETING

The summit, or meeting, of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) took place on 28th and 29th January. It was held in Havana, the capital of Cuba. Raul Castro, Cuba's president, hosted the summit.

CELAC was set up in 2010. The organisation held its first summit in Chile last year. CELAC has 33 member countries. They include most countries in South and Central America as well as the Caribbean.

Combined, CELAC countries cover about 15% of all the land in the world. Around 8.5% of the world's population live in them. These countries have a large percentage of the Earth's minerals. They also have 21% of the world's forests and one-third of all its fresh water.



CELAC meeting in Cuba

There are two other organisations or forums that include most of the CELAC countries. They are the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Summit of the Americas. However, since 1962, the USA has insisted that Cuba should not attend OAS meetings. Cuba is one of the few remaining communist

countries in the world. The USA has refused to speak with Cuban leaders since Raul Castro's elder brother, Fidel, took control of the country in 1959.

In recent years, other members of the OAS wanted Cuba to be able to rejoin the organisation. Yet the USA has said no. A few years ago, Mr Castro declared that if the USA agreed to it rejoining, Cuba would not take part in future OAS meetings. This, he argued, was because the OAS was controlled by the USA.

The argument over Cuba's membership of the OAS was one of the reasons CELAC was set up. Hugo Chávez, the former president of Venezuela, was one of the South American leaders who persuaded others to join CELAC. Canada and the USA were not invited to join.

Mr Chávez died of cancer last year, aged 58. He had been Venezuela's president from 1999 until his death. During this time he frequently complained about the USA. He accused American leaders of interfering in South and Central American countries.

At the start of the summit Mr Castro held a short period of silence. This, he explained, was in remembrance of Mr Chávez. Some of the discussions at the summit were about improving healthcare and education in CELAC countries. Cuba is a poor country, but its healthcare and education systems are some of the best in the world.

Nicolas Maduro took over as Venezuela's leader after Mr Chávez's death. He said that Puerto Rico should be invited to become CELAC's 34th member. Puerto Rico is a Caribbean country. Even though Puerto Rico is not officially part of the USA, the American government controls the country. ■

SLOTH TOILET HABIT EXPLAINED

The three-toed sloth is an unusual animal. It has a strange toilet habit. The animal spends nearly all of its time in trees. Yet once every seven or eight days it comes down to the ground and digs a hole. It defecates in the hole and then climbs back up the tree. A group of scientists from the USA say they have found out why the animal does this.



Three-toed sloth

There are several different types of sloths. The three-toed ones are found in South and Central America. They have three clawed toes on each of their legs. The claws, which are sharp, are used for climbing. Sloths spend long periods of time hanging upside down from tree branches. Adults are about the same size as a cat or small dog.

Sloths have a very slow metabolism. Metabolism is the different chemical processes in living things that control growth, energy production, and getting rid of waste. The animals mainly eat leaves. These are not easy to digest. What's more, leaves do not produce much energy. Sloths have large stomachs. It can take up to

one month to fully digest the leaves. The animals are slow moving.

Three-toed sloths have another food supply, algae. This grows on their fur. It explains why the animals have a greenish colour. The green colour means the sloths can be difficult to see amongst the leaves. They eat the algae when they lick their fur. Each strand of fur has small cracks in it. These cracks hold water, which helps the algae to grow.

However, algae are not the only things living in three-toed sloths' fur. It is also home to fungi and many different types of small moths. The moths are important for the algae. When the insects die the fungi decompose their bodies. This produces nitrogen, which is then used by the algae.

Why three-toed sloths come down from a tree to defecate has been a mystery. The animal uses a lot of energy doing this. Furthermore, while it is on the ground predators could attack the sloth. Some people suspected that the animal was fertilizing its favourite tree.

The group of scientists studied three-toed sloths in Costa Rica. They watched carefully when they came down from the trees. The scientists noticed that female moths would fly out of the sloth's fur after it had defecated. The insects then laid their eggs in the animal's dung. When the eggs hatched the larvae fed on the dung. Later, after they grew wings, the young moths flew up into the trees. They then found a sloth so they could live in its fur.

Therefore, it seems that the sloths defecate on the ground to help the moths. The moths, when they die, help the algae to grow. And the algae are an important part of the sloth's diet. Different living things relying on each other in this way is known as mutualism. ■

SAHEL APPEAL

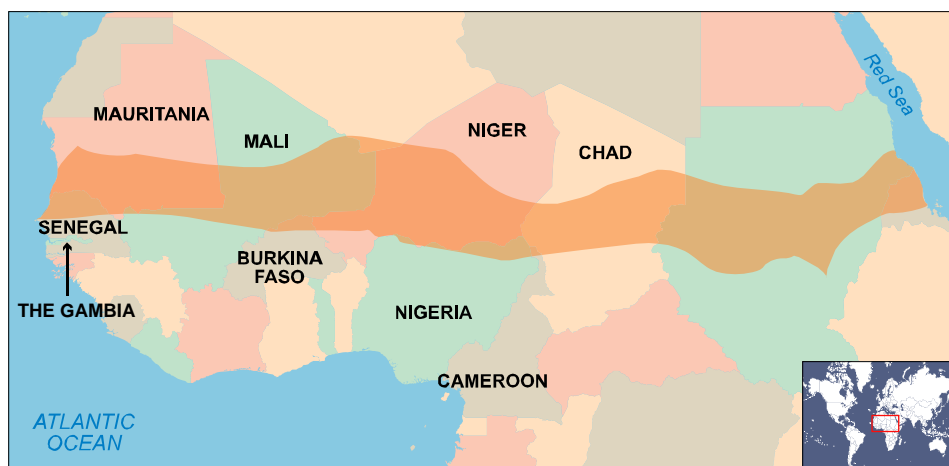
On 3rd February the United Nations (UN) started, or launched, a new appeal. It wants UN member countries to give, or donate, US\$2 billion (£1.25 billion). The UN says this money is needed to help people living in what's known as Africa's Sahel belt.

The Sahel belt, or region, is in the northern part of Africa. It stretches from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Red Sea in the east. The Sahel is about 5,400 kilometres (3,360 miles) long and up to 1,000 kilometres (620 miles) wide.

The Sahel separates the Sahara Desert, which is to the north, from

million are in need of immediate, or urgent, help. In this part of Africa at least five million children under five years of age are likely to suffer from [malnutrition](#).

The UN says that the number of people needing extra food in this part of the Sahel is double what it was last year. Some countries have managed to reduce the number of people who need food aid. These include Burkina Faso and Mali. Yet fighting and conflicts in some areas such as northern Nigeria have made things worse. In recent years the population has been growing in these areas. Yet the amount of food being produced has only increased slightly.



Sahel belt in North Africa

the places that have much more rainfall farther south. The Sahel is dry but there are some rains. It is mostly savanna, or grassland. Sahel is an Arabic word. It means 'coast' or 'shore'. So the Sahel is like a boundary between desert sands and places where there is a lot of vegetation.

The UN's appeal is for people living in parts of nine countries. These are: Mauritania, Senegal, the Gambia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, and Chad. The UN believes that, within the next three years, 20 million people living in these places are in danger of not having enough to eat. Of these 2.5

The climate of the Sahel region can cause difficulties. For example, there can be long periods with little or no rain. When this happens crops die or do not grow properly. Food becomes very expensive. Diseases are also a problem.

The UN wants to use much of the donated money to help farmers. First, it wants to make sure that the farmers' planting season is successful. Then, bad harvests need to be prevented. Increasing the amount of food grown in each country, the UN says, is the best solution. It means people do not become too dependent on food aid.

Getting countries to donate US\$2 billion (£1.25 billion) may be difficult. This is because a few months ago the UN launched a different appeal for US\$6.5 billion (£4 billion). The UN wants to raise this money to help those affected by the war in Syria. ■

FASTEST GLACIER?

Researchers have reported that one of Greenland's largest glaciers, or ice streams, is now moving four times faster than it was 50 years ago. Called the Jakobshavn Glacier, it flows into the sea on Greenland's western coast.

Most of Greenland's many glaciers flow through deep valleys. Over millions of years these have been carved out, or eroded, by the ice. At the end of the last ice age, around 10,000 years ago, the level of the sea rose and flooded the lower parts of these valleys. These flooded valleys are known as inlets or fjords. The front of the Jakobshavn Glacier, called a tongue or ice shelf, floats on the sea within a fjord.



Jakobshavn Glacier, in Greenland (NASA)

When the tongue of a glacier breaks off it is known as calving. If a large area of ice breaks off it can become an iceberg. This is a floating island of ice. Icebergs from this part of Greenland often drift southwards towards the North Atlantic Ocean. There, they can become a danger to shipping. The iceberg that sank

the *Titanic* is believed to have come from the Jakobshavn Glacier.

When the *Titanic* was built it was the biggest passenger ship in the world. The large ship was designed to take passengers and cargo across the North Atlantic Ocean between the UK and the USA. However, on its first, or maiden, voyage in 1912 the ship hit an iceberg and sank. Of the 2,224 people travelling on the ship 1,517 died.

Over the last 150 years the Jakobshavn Glacier has become shorter. It used to flow all the way to the open sea. Yet now the front of the glacier is much farther inland. Nowadays, when icebergs break off the glacier they can be too big to float down the fjord. The larger ones get stuck on the bottom where the water is shallower. Eventually, more icebergs calving behind them break them up.

Glaciers move at different speeds during the year. In the summer they speed up, and in the winter they slow down. The speed of the Jakobshavn Glacier can be measured from satellites. Satellite recordings show that last summer the glacier was moving at 17 kilometres (10.5 miles) a year, or about 46 metres (151 feet) each day. This means the glacier is now moving four times faster than it was during summer months in the 1990s. At that time the glacier was thought to be the quickest in Greenland. The researchers suspect that the Jakobshavn is now the fastest moving glacier in the world.

Warmer temperatures are probably why the Jakobshavn Glacier has retreated so far from the sea. As this happens, the researchers say, there is less ice at the 'front' of the glacier to hold back ice at the 'rear'. This may explain why the glacier is now moving so quickly.

Between 2000 and 2010 ice breaking off the Jakobshavn Glacier is believed to have increased the sea level by about one millimetre (0.04 inches). ■

PLAGUE DISCOVERY

A team of scientists have discovered that two of the most deadly plagues in history are connected. The plagues were about 800 years apart. Yet both were caused by different strains of the same deadly bacteria.



Picture from an old Bible showing a priest with people who are suffering from the Black Death

The two plagues were the Plague of Justinian and the Black Death. The Plague of Justinian struck the Eastern Roman Empire (also known as the Byzantine Empire) between the years 541 and 543. This empire's capital city was Constantinople. Today this city (which is now called Istanbul) is in Turkey. The plague is named after Justinian the First, who was the leader of the Eastern Roman Empire at that time. He is believed to have caught the plague and survived.

The Plague of Justinian is thought to have come from China. At the time no one knew what caused it. It's now known that rats and fleas

spread this plague. Humans could catch the disease if fleas, which had previously bitten an infected rat, bit them. Infected rats were accidentally taken from one country to another on wooden ships. People who caught the plague usually died within a few days.

This plague did not just affect the Eastern Roman Empire. It also spread across North Africa, the Middle East and Asia. The Plague of Justinian is believed to have killed around 40 million people. Then, this was about half of the world's population. For the next 200 years some places were still affected by this plague. Then the disease disappeared.

Rats and fleas also spread the Black Death. It too is thought to have come from China. The Black Death arrived in Europe in 1328 and lasted until 1351. There were also smaller outbreaks of this plague for the next 60 years. The disease is believed to have killed about 50 million people in Europe. Then, this was roughly one-third of the European population. In many cities around half of the people who lived in them died. Most thought the Black Death was a punishment from God.

Nowadays researchers are able to extract DNA from old human bones. DNA taken from the bones of people who died from the Black Death have shown that the disease was caused by a bacterium called *Yersinia pestis*.

The team of scientists studied two 1,500-year-old skeletons. They were found in Bavaria, in southern Germany. Both people had died of the Justinian plague. From DNA taken from their teeth they discovered that this plague was also caused by *Y. pestis*. However, this was a different type or strain of the microbe that caused the Black Death.

The scientists say it is interesting that the two plagues came from the same bacterium, especially as they happened 800 years apart. The plague has therefore 'jumped' from rats to humans more than once. This, the scientists suggest, means it might happen again. However, nowadays these types of plague can be cured with [antibiotics](#) and the correct medical treatment. ■

HOPE DIAMOND

The Hope Diamond is one of the most famous diamonds in the world. It is displayed in the Smithsonian Natural History Museum, in Washington DC, the capital of the USA. Every day thousands of visitors look at the diamond in its glass case. Now two mineral experts believe they have rediscovered one of the diamond's secrets.



The Hope Diamond

Gemstones, including diamonds, are measured in units called carats. A carat is 0.2 grams (0.007 ounces). When diamonds are first dug up, they are called 'rough' diamonds. Experts study the rough diamond to look for any flaws. They also look at the shape of the rough diamond to decide how best to cut and polish it.

A polished diamond is usually much smaller than the rough diamond from which it is made. This is because the rough diamond is cut

to make a [symmetrical](#) shape. Different shapes of diamond are worth different amounts of money. Diamonds are not always clear. Some have a colour such as pink, yellow or blue. Their colour can also affect how much they are worth.



Computer model of the French Blue showing how the gold Sun or sunburst would have looked

The Hope Diamond is 45.52 carats. It is a deep blue colour. In the past the diamond was known as the French Blue. It is about 2.5 centimetres (one inch) across. Some people describe the diamond as being about the same size as a walnut.

It's believed that a French merchant bought the diamond in India. He then took it back to France in 1668. At that time it was a rough or badly cut diamond. The diamond was given or sold to the French king, Louis the Fourteenth. A royal jeweller then cut and polished it. The diamond was fixed to the top of a stick, which was used by the king.

People who cut diamonds used to make replicas, or copies, of them. These were often made of a metal such as lead. The diamond cutters used these to plan how they were going to cut the diamond. In 2009 the French Blue's original lead copy was found in a museum in France.


During the French Revolution (1789 – 1799) the French Blue was stolen. It then appeared in the UK in 1812. After this the diamond seemed to disappear again. However, in 1839 it was known that a

CHICKEN FREEDOM — Transport police in China have had to deal with a difficult problem. In very foggy weather a large truck suddenly swerved to avoid a vehicle in front. The truck, which was carrying 3,000 live chickens, over turned. The crash blocked a busy road. Most of the chickens escaped. The road was closed to stop all other trucks, buses and cars from driving along it. The police then set off to find the chickens. However, by this time, many of the birds had left the road. The police tried to catch them in nearby bushes. Taking some of the chicken cages with them, they tried to persuade the birds to go back inside them. Most appeared reluctant to do so. The chickens seemed to prefer their unexpected freedom. After catching 900, the police decided that it would be impossible to catch the remainder.

In the mid 1850s it was suspected that Hope's diamond was the French Blue, which had been re-cut. The diamond was now smaller and its shape was different. It became known as the Hope Diamond. In the early 1900s it was sold to an American diamond dealer. Several people in the USA bought and sold the Hope Diamond before it was eventually given to The Smithsonian.

It was only when the lead copy was found that experts were able to prove the Hope and the French Blue were the same diamond. However, the replica was an unusual shape. Nowadays diamonds are cut with sharp angles. This makes them sparkle as light is reflected within them.

The two experts created a computer model of the original shape. From this they discovered the reason the diamond was cut in this unusual way. If it were placed on a yellow background a gold sun or sunburst would ‘magically’ appear in the centre of the diamond.

Louis the Fourteenth's colours were blue and gold. What's more he was known as the 'Sun King'. So the blue diamond, on top of his stick, with a sunburst in its centre, would have been a powerful symbol. 

More than 100 new **generic** top-level domain names (gTLDs) were released on 3rd February. One was the first gTLD to be in a non-Latin script or alphabet. Websites can now end in the Arabic script, **كشب**. This means ‘web’ or ‘network’. It is pronounced ‘dot shabaka’.

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) is an organisation that was set up to control the use of internet address names. It is based in the state of California, in the USA. The organisation holds frequent meetings in different cities around the world. Over the last few years ICANN has been making plans to increase the number of available gTLDs. Around five months ago it asked people and companies to send in the names they would like to register.

Until now there have only been 22 gTLDs. These included .com, .net, .org, .info, and .biz. Several years ago ICANN added some other domain names (also known as country codes) to this list. Examples are .cn, .uk, .in, or .ca.

In recent years some people have been worrying that the number of available web addresses has been running out. Many also complained that gTLDs were only available in Latin script.

Latin script is also known as Roman script. This is because it's the way that the Romans used to write. To many people, Latin script is the familiar 26-letter alphabet that begins with A and ends with Z. Yet, since Roman times, this alphabet has had several changes. For instance, the Romans did not use the letter W. They also wrote in what are now known as capital letters, or upper-case letters. The smaller, or lower-case letters, are a more recent invention.

However, millions of people do not use Latin script. There are many other alphabets that have different characters, such as Korean, Cyrillic, Arabic, Hebrew and Sanskrit. Over one billion people use Mandarin or Chinese characters. Until now, part of internet addresses could be in other alphabets, but gTLDs had to be in Latin script.



As well as dot shabaka several other non-Latin script gTLDs will soon be released. They include the Chinese characters that mean ‘game’ and the Russian words онлайн (meaning online) and сайт (meaning website).

Even though 100 new gTLDs have just been released, another 1,000 will be made available during 2014. Some of the new gTLDs are

for cities or locations. Two examples are .berlin (the capital of Germany) and .wein (or Vienna, the capital of Austria). Within the next 12 months there will be other city names such as .london and .paris.

Many companies have applied for gTLDs. So there will be .microsoft and .google. There will also be gTLDs for different activities or industries. Some examples are .clothing, .bike and .build. A few of the more unusual new ones are .ninja and .cool. Buying a web address (for 12 months) that includes one of these new gTLDs will cost between £10 (US\$16) and £30 (US\$49). ■

FLYING SNAKES

For many years flying snakes have puzzled scientists. They wondered how the snakes managed to stay in the air for such a long time. Now researchers from the USA think that they may have discovered the answer.

There are five different types of flying snake. Most live in South East Asia. Some are also found in southern India and Sri Lanka. The largest flying snakes are about 1.2 metres (four feet) long. They hunt during the day. The snakes feed on frogs, lizards, birds, and bats. They have a poisonous bite. Yet their poison, or venom, is not very strong. So the snakes are not dangerous to humans.

Flying snakes cannot fly like birds. Instead they glide. As they travel through the air the snakes move their heads from side to side. This movement passes waves down their bodies. They therefore glide in a similar way to how other snakes move along the ground. Flying snakes are arboreal. This means they live in trees. When flying, the

snakes either land on the ground or glide from one tree to another.

Some other creatures are able to glide. Flying squirrels and flying lizards are examples. Both have a thin area of skin between their limbs, or front and back legs. When these creatures glide they stretch out their limbs. The skin between their legs helps them to stay in the air. Even though the snakes have no limbs, they can fly for longer distances than flying squirrels and lizards. Some flying snakes are able to glide for 100 metres (330 feet).



Flying snake

Before it 'takes off' a flying snake goes to the end of a tree branch. The snake keeps moving until only its tail is wrapped around the branch. It then pushes its head and body upwards and away from the tree. As the snake leaves the branch its body quickly changes shape. From just behind its head to near the end of its tail the snake becomes much flatter.

The researchers discovered how the snake does this. The snake can move its many rib bones both forward and upwards. This makes its body twice as wide. Like other snakes a flying snake's body is round, or circular. Yet when gliding the snake's belly, or lower part of its body, has a **concave** shape. So in **cross section**, the snake's body turns from a circle to an arched semi-circle. This is a similar shape to the cross section of the wings of some aircraft.

The researchers made a plastic model of the shape of the snake as it is in flight. They then tested the model in a water tank. Water is much more dense than air. However, from the experiment the researchers worked out how air flows around the snake's body. This airflow explains how the snake stays in the air for such a long time.

The researchers think the way the snake's body moves must also be important. When gliding a snake moves its head once or twice every second. The waves that move down its body make it look as if the snake is 'swimming in the air'. The researchers say more work will need to be done to find out how this movement affects their flight. ■

DROWNED LAND DISCOVERED

A team of researchers in Sweden have discovered a drowned **landscape**. It is under the Baltic Sea close to the southern part of the country. Parts of the underwater landscape are covered in the remains of trees. There are also signs of human activity, such as ropes and wooden fish traps. The researchers believe that this area of land flooded around 9,000 years ago.



A researcher diving above the drowned land near the south coast of Sweden (Arne Sjöström)

The last ice age is believed to have ended about 10,000 years ago. During this ice age the level of the sea was much lower than it is today.

This is because huge amounts of the water were 'locked up' in the ice. Much of what is now the Baltic Sea was dry land.

Archaeologists often divide the early history of man into three main periods, or eras. These are the Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age. The Neolithic was at the end of the Stone Age. It is often called the New Stone Age.

Before the New Stone Age humans are described as being hunter-gatherers. They did not grow their food. Instead they travelled around hunting animals and collecting fruit, nuts and berries. In different parts of the world people then began to live in small settlements, or villages. They also started to grow certain plants for food and domesticate wild animals.

Some people call this change from hunter-gatherers to farmers the

Neolithic Revolution. It was an important time in human history. This 'revolution' happened at different times in different parts of the world. People living in this part of Sweden before it flooded are thought to have been hunter-gatherers. Therefore, finding ropes and wooden fish traps was a surprise.

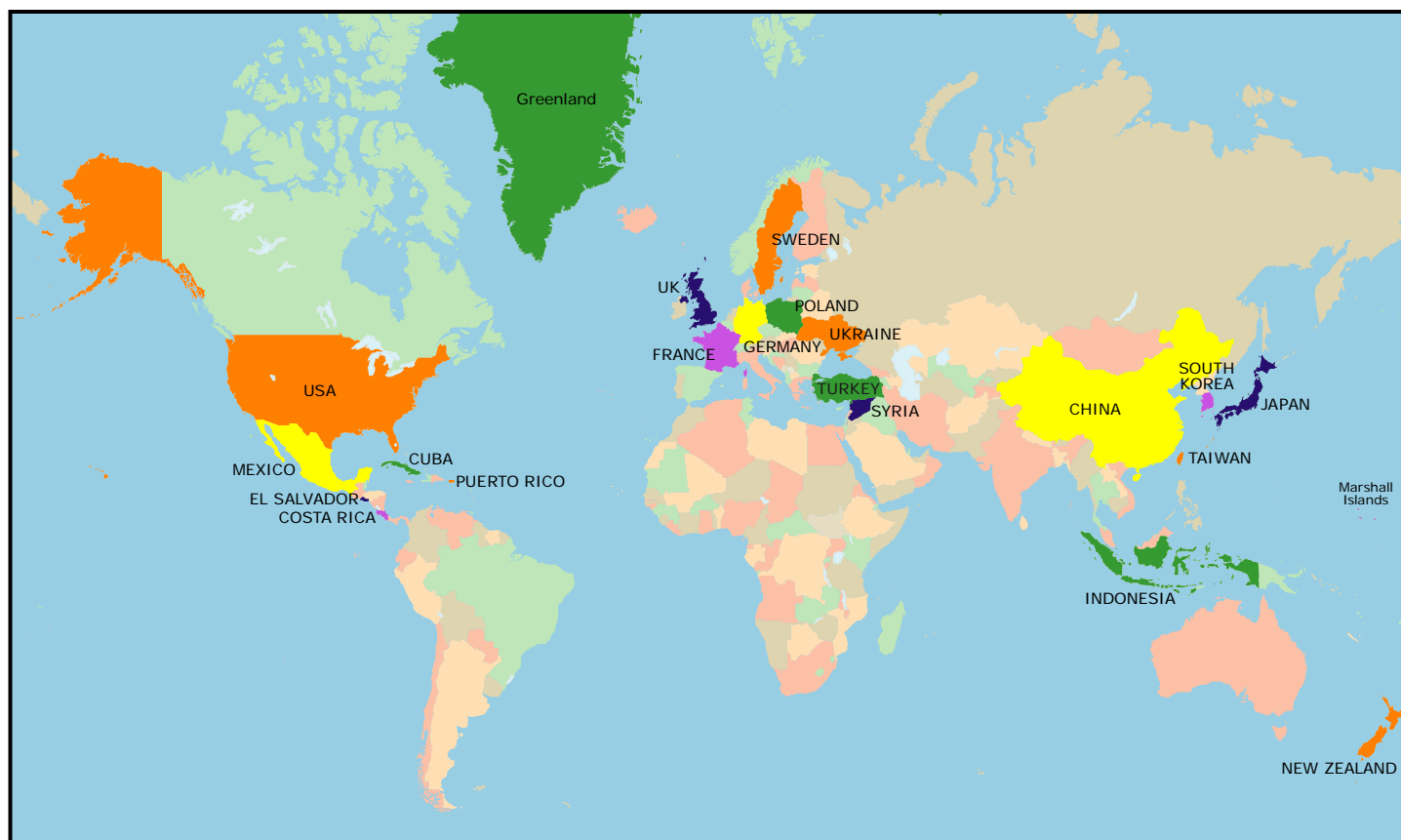
The researchers believe that the drowned wooded landscape used to be near the coast. As the ice melted it flooded. Today the sea in this area is about 20 metres (65 feet) deep. Usually organic material such as wood will decompose, or rot away. Yet the seawater has preserved the ropes, traps and fallen trees.

The researchers have also discovered other artefacts on the seabed. They include flint tools (flint is a type of stone), animal horns and bones from an auroch. It looks as if humans have used these bones

as tools. Aurochs were very large and aggressive wild cattle. They lived in Europe and parts of Asia. Experts believe that humans managed to domesticate some aurochs around 8,000 years ago. It's thought that many modern-day cows are descended from these domesticated aurochs.

The fish traps were made of branches that came from hazel trees. It is possible to date organic things such as wood. Scientists do this by a process known as carbon dating. Carbon dating shows that the traps were made about 9,000 years ago.

The researchers say that most of the items have been left on the seabed. Before they can bring them to the surface the area will need to be carefully photographed and mapped. After this has been completed they will be able to search the underwater landscape for more artefacts. ▣



STATE OF THE UNION

On 29th January, Barack Obama, the president of the USA, delivered the State of the Union speech, or address. This speech is an annual event. It normally takes place between the second half of January and mid February.

The president's address is made to the American Congress (or parliament) in Washington DC, the country's capital. Congress includes all the elected members of the House of Representatives and the Senate.

In the past the speech was made during the day. But nowadays it happens at around nine o'clock in the evening. This is so the largest possible number of people in the country can see or hear what the president has to say. The speech is broadcast live on American television and radio.



Barack Obama's State of the Union address

Traditionally, the president uses the address to report on what has happened during the last year. He also announces his plan for the next 12 months. This includes what America is doing or trying to do in other countries. Even though the president is speaking to members of Congress, the speech is used as a way of talking to everyone in the country.

Usually the address lasts for about one hour. There is frequent loud clapping, or applause. There are two main political parties in

the USA, the Democrats and the Republicans. Mr Obama is a member of the Democratic Party. So most of the applause came from the elected members of Congress who are Democrats.

There are 435 elected members in the House of Representatives (often called the House). The Senate is different. It has 100 members, or senators, or two from each American state. Currently the Democrats have a majority in the Senate. Yet the Republicans have more members in the House of Representatives. This has led to arguments between the Republicans in the House and Mr Obama.

Many of these arguments have been about taxes and how much money the government spends. The Republicans want lower government spending and lower taxes. The Democrats think the government should spend more. This means that the taxes many wealthier people pay will have to increase. Over the last year the Republicans in the House have refused to agree to many of the president's spending plans.

During his speech Mr Obama talked about 'social mobility'. This is how easy it is for people who come from poor families to get a good education and a good job. Mr Obama said that social mobility in the USA has become much harder. This means the gap between rich and poor people is getting wider. Mr Obama said the minimum wage should go up. This is the least amount per hour that workers must be paid. Currently the minimum wage in the USA is US\$7.25 (£4.45) per hour. Mr Obama wants it to increase to US\$10.10 (£6.20).

Since the 1960s the State of the Union address has been followed by what's known as the 'opposi-

tion response'. This is a speech made by a member of the opposing political party. However, this speech, which is also shown on live television, is not made in front of members of Congress. Instead it is filmed in an office or television studio. The person making the 'response' will explain why their party disagrees with some of the president's plans.



The Capitol Building, in Washington DC, where members of the House and the Senate meet

Cathy McMorris Rodgers gave this year's opposition response. She claimed that more government spending and higher taxes made life harder for most people. This, she argued, was because it meant there would be fewer well paid jobs for poor people. ■

BRIGHTER NORTH STAR

Just over ten years ago astronomers, scientists who study the stars and planets, noticed that Polaris was getting brighter. Polaris is a pole star. Scientists from the USA have been studying old records to find out how bright Polaris was in the past.

Many people call Polaris the North Star. Today, if you were standing at the North Pole and looked upwards, Polaris would be directly above you. The Earth spins on its axis. This is an imaginary line running from the North to the South

Pole. If the northern part of the axis were extended out into space it would point to Polaris. This is why it is also called the North Star.



Long exposure photograph with Polaris at the centre of the night sky, as the other stars appear to move in a circular path around it

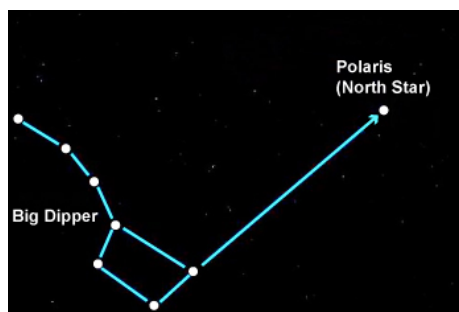
In the night sky the stars appear to move around the Earth. Yet it is the spinning of the Earth that makes it look as if the stars are moving. As the North Star is directly above the North Pole it does not 'move'. The other stars seem to go around it in a circular path. This can be seen in photographs that have very long exposure times.

The best way to find Polaris in the night sky of the northern hemisphere is to look for a constellation called Ursa Major (Latin for 'Larger Bear'). This group of stars is also known as the Great Bear, the Plough and the Big Dipper. If imaginary lines are drawn between these stars, the shape looks like a saucepan with a long handle. On the opposite side of the handle are two stars. A line from the lower one through the top one points to the North Star. Some people call these two stars 'pointer stars'. The distance from the top

pointer star to the North Star is about five times longer than the distance between the two pointer stars.

Hundreds of years ago the North Star was used for navigation. It helped sailors to work out in which direction they should sail. Yet the North Star changes. This means that Polaris is not always the North Star. As the Earth spins on its axis it has a slight 'wobble'. This means that, over long periods of time, the Earth's axis points to different places in the night sky. The axis slowly 'traces' or 'draws' a circle. It takes about 26,000 years to go all the way around it. This 'movement' is called precession.

Around 5,000 years ago the North Star was not Polaris. Instead it was a star called Thuban. This star is much dimmer than Polaris. In Roman times there was no North Star. Polaris will continue to be a pole star for the next 1,000 years. Then a star called Alrai will become the 'new' North Star. Polaris will be the North Star again, but not for another 25,000 years.



How to find Polaris from the Big Dipper

Like a North Star there can also be a South Star. This star would be directly above the South Pole. However, currently there is not a bright star in this area. The nearest is a faint star called Sigma Octantis. Some people call this star the South Star.

The scientists believe that Polaris is now much brighter than it was in

the early 1800s. They worked this out by studying records kept by old astronomers. Looking at even earlier records, the scientists suspect that Polaris is now roughly 4.6 times brighter than it was about 3,000 years ago. Polaris is what's known as a variable star. These types of stars are known to get both brighter and dimmer. However, this normally happens over much shorter periods of time. ■

INDONESIAN VOLCANO ERUPTS

Mount Sinabung, one of the many volcanoes in Indonesia, erupted on 1st February. Rocks, ash and hot gases were thrown two kilometres (1.25 miles) into the air. Super heated, or burning, clouds of ash quickly travelled down the sides of the volcano.

Volcanoes are often described as being active, dormant or extinct. An active volcano is one that has erupted during the last several hundred years. If a volcano last erupted several thousand years ago it is called dormant. Extinct volcanoes are those that are thought unlikely to erupt ever again.

The outer layer of the Earth is known as the 'crust'. Tectonic plates are huge sections of the Earth's crust that move about slowly on the magma, or hot liquid rock, that is deep below the surface.

Volcanoes are often found where tectonic plates are being pushed together or being pulled apart. This movement can create a gap in the Earth's crust that allows the magma to come to the surface.

Indonesia is the world's fourth-most populated country. It is part of what scientists call the 'Ring of Fire'. This is a horseshoe-shaped

line running around the edge of the Pacific Ocean. Along it a number of tectonic plates meet and bump into each other.

Mount Sinabung is one of Indonesia's 129 active volcanoes. It is on Sumatra, which is Indonesia's largest island. The volcano is close to Lake Toba. This is a volcanic crater, which is now filled with water. The crater is over 100 kilometres (62 miles) long and 30 kilometres (18.5 miles) wide. Scientists call Lake Toba a supervolcano. The explosion that formed the lake is thought to have happened sometime between 77,000 and 69,000 years ago. The effects of this huge eruption are believed to have altered the world's climate and killed most of the humans alive at that time.



Mount Sinabung

Four years ago Mount Sinabung began erupting for the first time in around 400 years. Around 30,000 people living close to the volcano were moved to nearby towns and villages. Later they were allowed to return to their homes. The volcano started to erupt again several months ago. Once again people living near Mount Sinabung were ordered to leave their homes. Since then these people have been living in crowded tents, schools and other public buildings.

However, as the volcanic activity had decreased, government officials decided to let some people return to their homes. On 31st January they said that 14,000 people who live at

least five kilometres (three miles) away from the volcano could return. Yet, even though they had been warned of the danger, some people who live closer went back to check on their homes.

Rescue workers began searching areas close to the volcano after the eruption. Government officials said that the super heated ash clouds had killed 16 people. Several people were rescued, but they all had serious burns. ■

PACIFIC CASTAWAY FOUND

Ebon Atoll is a small coral island in the Pacific Ocean. Only a few people live there. The island is part of the Marshall Islands. On 30th January some local people were surprised to find an unknown man on the island. His small boat had drifted ashore.

The man, whose name is Jose Salvador Alvarenga, spoke Spanish. His hair and beard were long and he was only wearing ragged underpants. There were many shells growing on the outside of his seven-metre (23 foot) long boat. Inside the boat were a baby seabird, a dead turtle and some turtle shells.

Mr Alvarenga said he came from El Salvador. This country is in Central America, on the other side of the Pacific Ocean. He explained that many years ago he had left El Salvador and gone to Mexico. There, he worked as a fisherman. Mr Alvarenga says he went out in the boat to catch sharks in December 2012. A younger man was with him.

A storm blew their boat out to sea. The motor stopped working and the boat began to drift. Mr Alvarenga says he caught birds, turtles and fish. However, the younger man refused to eat the raw food.

He died about one month after their boat started drifting. Mr Alvarenga explained that after the death of the boy he thought about killing himself, but was unable to do so.

The boat kept drifting. All the time Mr Alvarenga hoped that a passing ship would find him. He said that when there was not enough rainwater he would drink the blood of turtles and birds. If Mr Alvarenga's story is true he was in the boat for 13 months. What's more his boat must have drifted for at least 8,000 kilometres (5,000 miles). People who are stuck in drifting boats or on remote islands are often called castaways.

Mr Alvarenga was taken to one of the larger Marshall Islands for medical treatment. Some people were surprised at how he looked. If he had been a castaway for such a long time they thought he would be much thinner. Also, Mr Alvarenga does not seem to have been burnt by the Sun. However, his ankles and face were swollen and he had trouble walking. When he was found Mr Alvarenga was very weak.



Mr Alvarenga's parents in El Salvador had not seen him for eight years. However, after being shown pictures of the castaway they were sure that he was their son. In Mexico, Mr Alvarenga's boss confirmed that the two men had gone missing on 20th November 2012. They had

set off on a fishing trip with enough food and water for 24 hours. After they did not return other fishermen went to look for them.

Once he is well enough Mr Alvaranga will be taken back to Mexico. Some people find it hard to believe his story. Yet the shells growing on his boat mean it must have been in the water for a long time. Furthermore, something similar has happened before. In 2006 three Mexican fishermen were rescued near the Marshall Islands. Their boat had been drifting for nine months. They said they had survived by drinking rainwater and eating fish and seabirds. ■

MUNICH SECURITY CONFERENCE

The Munich Security Conference (MSC) was held between 31st January and 2nd February. Munich, where the annual meeting took place, is in southern Germany. It is one of the country's largest cities. This year's meeting was the 50th MSC.

The MSC is held in one of Munich's large hotels. It has become a conference where government officials and important people can meet and speak freely with each other. The discussions are about security. This is making sure that people are free from dangers such as war, violence, terrorism and criminal acts.

Usually about 350 senior officials from at least 70 countries attend the MSC. They normally include around 20 presidents or prime ministers. This year Ban Ki-moon, the secretary-general, or leader, of the United Nations (UN) was at the conference. Sergei Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister, and the USA's

secretary of state, John Kerry, were there. Catherine Ashton, or Baroness Ashton, also took part. She is the European Union's (EU's) head of foreign affairs.

There are some short speeches at the MSC. However, most of the time is used for panel discussions. Three or four people sit on the stage and discuss different subjects. They also answer questions from people in the audience. At this year's conference most of the discussions were about the war in Syria, Iran's nuclear programme and the recent protests in Ukraine.



MSC panel discussion

For the last three months there have been large protests in Kiev, the capital of Ukraine. The protesters are angry with their country's president, Viktor Yanukovich. This is because he decided not to sign an agreement with the European Union (EU). The agreement would have helped Ukraine to trade with the 28 EU member countries. Instead, Mr Yanukovich said a trade agreement would be made with Russia.

For many years Ukraine was part of the Russian-led Soviet Union. It became an independent country in 1990. This was when the old Soviet Union began to break up. The protesters in Kiev want their country to be associated with Europe and not Russia. However, there are many people in Ukraine who support Mr Yanukovich's decision to work with Russia.

The protesters say Mr Yanukovich should step down. They now want new elections to be held. Some protesters have been occupying several government buildings. Others attacked the police after they tried to remove some of the protesters' camps in the centre of Kiev. Many accuse police leaders of mistreating protesters who have been arrested.

Both Mr Lavrov and Mr Kerry spoke about Ukraine at the MSC. A senior member of Ukraine's government and one of the protest leaders took part in a panel discussion.

Mr Kerry argued in favour of the protesters. He said that they had a right to 'fight' for democracy in their country. Mr Lavrov disagreed. He said it was wrong for EU countries and the USA to encourage people to break the law in Ukraine. He argued that if anyone occupied government buildings in the EU or USA they would be severely punished.

As this was the MSC's 50th meeting some special guests were invited. They included Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, a former president of France, Helmut Schmidt, who used to be the German chancellor, and the former American secretary of state, Henry Kissinger. All three had taken part in the MSC's first conference 50 years ago. ■

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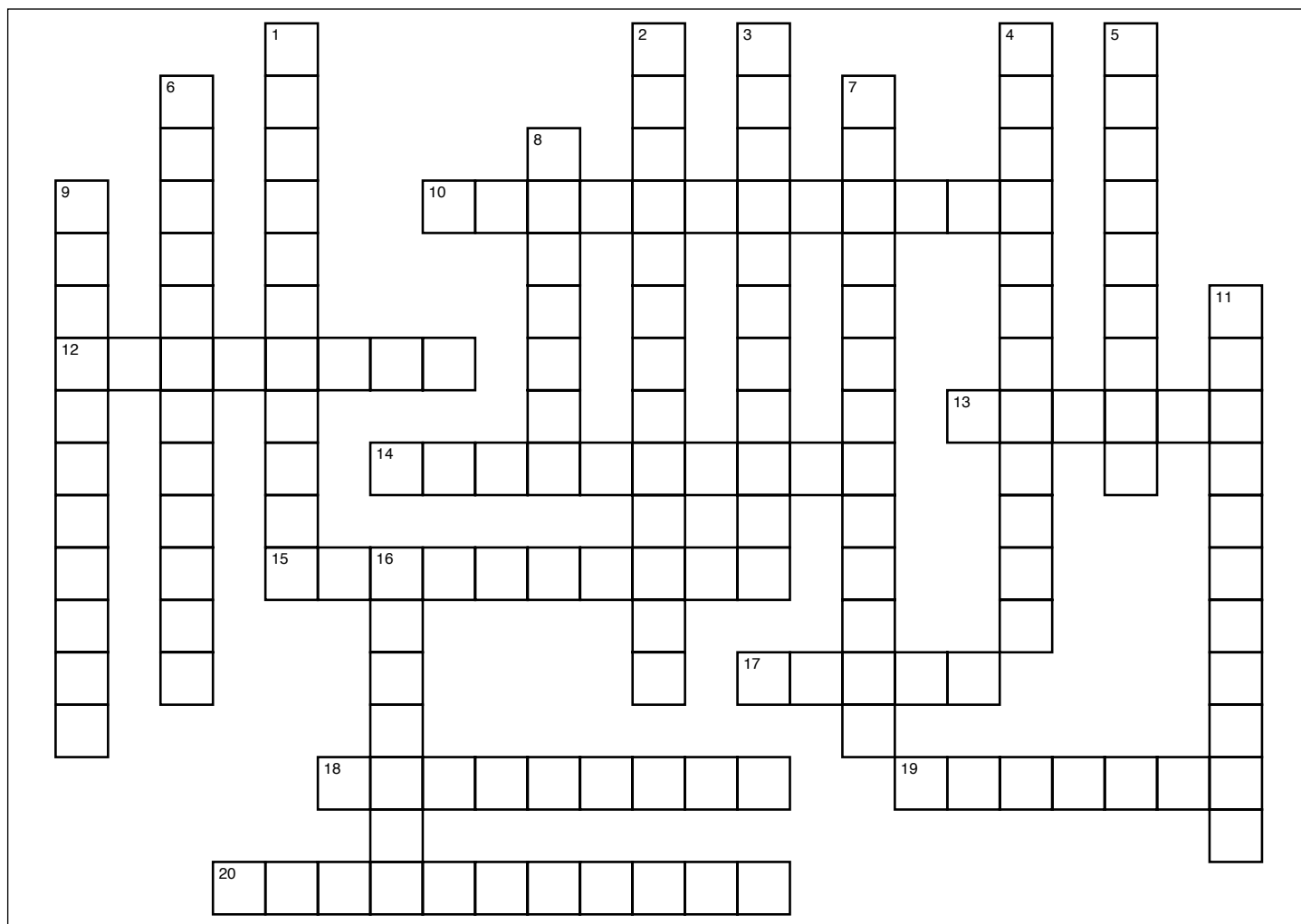
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ISSUE 216

GLOSSARY PUZZLE

INSTRUCTIONS: ① Complete the crossword. The answers are highlighted in orange in the news stories. There are 25 words highlighted and you need 20 of them to complete the crossword. ② Once you have solved the crossword go to the word search on the next page ➡



ACROSS

- 10 Noun** The two-dimensional view of something if it were cut at a right angle to its length (5,7)
12 Adjective Describes something imaginary, fictional, or not real
13 Verb To process or break down food so it can be absorbed into the body
14 Noun Freedom and equal rights for people who have experienced discrimination or been unfairly treated
15 Verb Changing something so that it is no longer accurate or true
17 Noun An island made up of a circular coral reef that surrounds a lagoon
18 Verb To give something an official name, title, or purpose
19 Adjective Describes something that applies to a whole class or group
20 Verb To bring animals or plants under human control for transport, food, power or companionship

DOWN

- 1 Verb** Became involved in a wide variety of different things
2 Noun A group of stars in the night sky that appears to form a pattern and has been given a name
3 Verb Getting involved in something where you are not welcome
4 Noun Bad health because of a lack, or the wrong type, of food
5 Verb Discharges solid waste that comes out of a human or other living organism
6 Noun Sudden important development or success
7 Noun The act of getting rid of certain animals or people, usually by killing them all
8 Adjective Curved inward
9 Adjective Describes having parts that match or mirror each other
11 Noun Medicines taken to kill bacteria that cause disease
16 Adjective Open, honest and genuine; not deceitful

Issue 216

GLOSSARY PUZZLE *CONTINUED*

N O I T A N I M R E T X E J K R Y C
 O O O V C F K H C G G R A P V V D R
 I I I A S E H O J X N N E N C I J O
 T E I T Q G N E U N T B X B S H J S
 A N B K I C Y Z E I L S V T E T J S
 L L I P A R J V B S W L O O S I I S
 L A I V W W T I K Z C R I E E N P E
 E C E B U L O U B K T T G G T L T C
 T I E S E T O L N I V I T E A A D T
 S R W C I R S N N L D F R K C C E I
 N T E C I Y A G E X A F X I E C S O
 O E S X J R L T H U E M T D F D I N
 C M I E J X E T I R A S N Y E H G R
 E M N O G X O N I O E Z U S D D N O
 E Y C J M C I N E M N L L L O T A B
 F S E Q E R G R O G M R N M M W T Y
 N H R F V N J D I V E R S I F I E D
 B R E A K T H R O U G H J I Q K Y Y

INSTRUCTIONS: ③ Find 19 of the 20 crossword answers in the word search. Words can go vertically, horizontally, diagonally and back to front. ④ After finding the 19 words write down the 20th (or missing) word under the puzzle.

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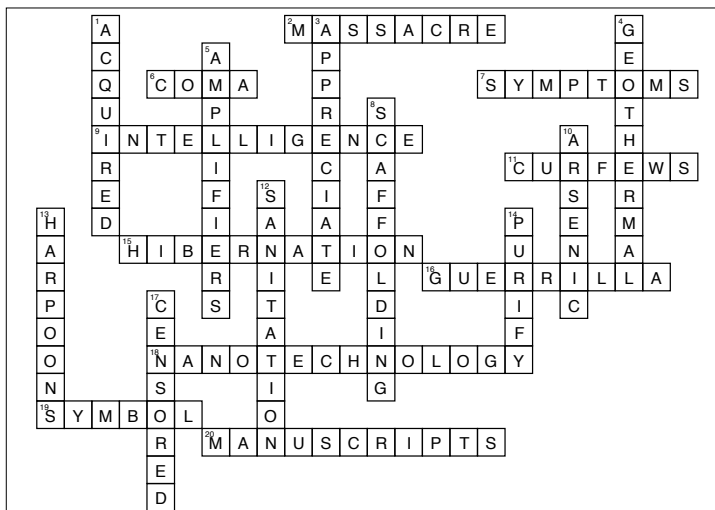


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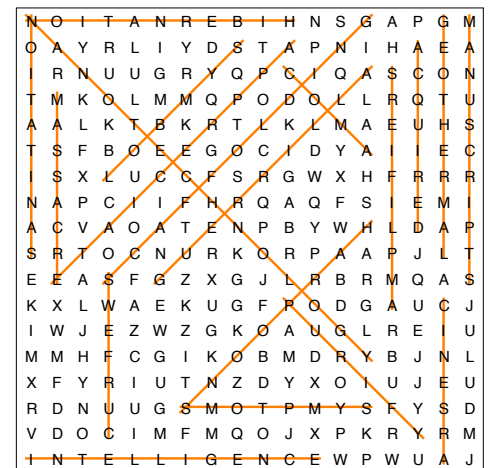
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MISSING WORD ANSWER =



ISSUE 215 ANSWERS



C E N S O R E D